DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 129 233 IR 004 009

AUTHOR Hightower, Monteria
TITLE Commonalities and Diversities in Public Library Programming in a Pluralistic Society, Serving our Ethnic Publics.
PUB DATE Jul 76
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the American Library Association Annual Conference (95th, Chicago, Illinois, July 18-24, 1976)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Ethnic Groups; *Interpersonal Relationship; Library Planning; *Library Programs; Library Services; Minority Groups; Public Libraries
IDENTIFIERS ALA 76

ABSTRACT

To be effective with the public, librarians should develop communication skills, should be accepting of their communities, and should be sensitive to the client's need for status. Previous International Federation of Library Associations guidelines have stated service standards for ethnic communities with greater than 500 residents, but more emphasis needs to be placed on interpersonal relations. Librarians should be sensitized to the needs of ethnic individuals, a goal which can be achieved by inviting representatives of ethnic communities to participate in identifying needs, planning programs, and evaluating processes. (EMH)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED129233

COMMONALITIES AND DIVERSITIES IN PUBLIC LIBRARY PROGRAMMING IN A PLURALISTIC SOCIETY, SERVING OUR ETHNIC PUBLICS

by

Monteria Hightower
Supervisor, Branches and Extension
District of Columbia Public Library

ALA Annual Conference
Chicago, Illinois
July 1976

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

IR 004 009

Society dictates that every public library operates in a constantly changing environment which makes new demands on types of service and programs as well as the quality of service and programs. Changes of a social and political nature, which do indeed affect the library's operation, are occurring at such a rapid pace that it is difficult for librarians to plan for and serve mainstream America; and to include ethnic groups in this process literally tends to throw most people for a loop. When, and as our libraries accept and adjust to serving other than mainstream America, there is a period of adjustment which is necessary to develop an atmosphere within the system that encourages creative thinking and is conducive to the acceptance of new publics whose needs are exactly the same as mainstream America, with exceptions given to form, level and type. There are, however, circumstances surrounding the planning process to include our ethnic groups, which bring us to where we are today.

The diversities and commonalities that affect programming in library situations for ethnic publics are more evident in levels than in types. It would be unfair as well as untrue to say that no attempts are being made to serve our ethnic publics; however, the extent to which these attempts are being made are based on the level of commitment and understanding that is prevalent throughout the library system,

from top administration to pages. The effectiveness of these attempts is dependent further on the acceptance of the entire staff that the library is designed to serve all human beings regardless of their background or present status.

In program planning and serving people in general, there are some aspects of human relations that we in the library profession must be cognizant of in our staff if we are to bring about mutual acceptances of the diversities with which we must deal:

A. Communication

1. Sharing in meaning: Does what I say mean the same thing to you as it does to me?

2. Sharing in feeling: Do I feel what you feel when you express yourself to me?

3. Sharing in respect: It is not necessary for everyone to be exactly alike. Ethnic groups want to share in American culture, but not at the expense of their own cultures. I respect your traditions, and you respect mine. Can you imagine what this world would be like if we were all just alike?

B. In our process, we must be able to accept and work with the variables that each person brings into the setting. (These could very well be considered problems.)

1. Language differences. This is inherent in our ability to communicate with each other. Even if we speak the same language, do the words mean the same thing to each other?

2. Cultural differences. Must I give up all of my cultural

traditions just to function in your kind of world? We cannot afford to eliminate diversity completely; instead, perhaps our diversities should be legitimized. We, in the library profession, must learn to deal with diversity and pluralism in our society.

3. Differences in concerns. You will notice that I have said concerns not NEEDS. People are frustrated at the local level. There needs to be more representation, there is too much of a gap in status, economy and quality of life. There is a need for the mediation of institutions, and there are too many social inequalities. A good example of differences in concerns is the fact that many of our ethnic people are more concerned with what is happening now vs. mainstream America planning for five or ten years hence. You know about 10-year, 5-year plans. But what about NOW? Perhaps this is where the library could make a real impact.

4. Insecurities: Academic, economic and social.

5. Reluctance to make change and accept something new. How may we, in the library, persuade our ethnic groups that the new (some of it anyway) is o.k. without threatening them?

C. Sensitivity

1. Recognizing people as people in our approach to people:

- Avoiding manipulation or making people feel that they are being manipulated.

- Allowing for interaction and participation: One to one as well as in groups.

- Accepting people and encouraging them to live together in their differences.

- Developing an atmosphere of mutual status: You're o.k. and I'm o.k. Not you're o.k. if you don't make

a nuisance of yourself, and I'm o.k. because I'm the librarian. The liberties of individuals must be highlighted in our attempts to serve them, and we must be farsighted and adaptable.

2. Our attitudes are on the line throughout the entire process.

The above is a starter and just a part of what I think and feel. By contrast, the International Federation of Library Associations published a set of Standards for Public Libraries[1] in 1973, and the above aspects relating to staff are not spelled out at all. Instead, the standards say that there are three related factors in staff requirements for public libraries: (1) Population of the public served; (2) volume of use; and (3) the range of services provided. Those same standards state that "a distinction must be made between permanent resident national minorities and non-indigenous immigrant groups". They state that "permanent resident national minorities SHOULD BE (emphasis mine) provided with literature in their mother tongue on the same terms as the general standards". You know what the general standards are, so I will not go into them. For non-indigenous groups, the standards say "The PROVISION OF A SERVICE TO NON-INDIGENOUS IMMIGRANT GROUPS NOW CONCERNS MANY PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES."

---

(1) International Federation of Library Associations. Standards for Public Libraries. Totowa, N.J., Rowman and Littlefield, 1973.

Special efforts should be made to encourage use... Arrangements may be needed on a national scale to solve the problems... It indicates more and concerns itself with the duration of stay, etc. But the standards limit the extent of services to the number of people. For example, they state that any group of 500 or more people in a community should be recognized as requiring public library service in their own language, including both books and periodicals. This is not too crucial, except the standards made no provisions for the 129's, 237's or 486's, communities of less than 500 people. Which means that they are left to the mercy of the local librarian who has no guidelines. But then, who follows standards anyway? I feel it important to make this point because today we are talking about diversities and commonalities in programming for our ethnic groups and perhaps the standards are where we should start and work our way up or down, whichever the case may be.

Using the above mentioned ideas as a basis for our discussion, I will try and tie this thinking into some basic questions and suggestions that will, hopefully, motivate us to take a good look at our present situation in terms of goals and objectives, utilization of staff, the planning process, the selection of materials and types of programs to meet the needs of our ethnic groups.

Inherent in any attempts to plan programs and serve our ethnic publics are some basic assumptions that I feel are made, or should be made, by the library. For example:

1. Ethnic groups are comprised of human beings with the same needs and desires of any other human beings.

2. People, be they ethnic or otherwise, will follow their own interest.

3. Ethnic groups must be allowed to participate in their own education or re-education.

4. People are rational, when they understand the process.

5. All people have some common needs.

6. Ethnic groups want to be involved in solving their own problems.

7. The traditions and diversities of people are precious and should be held onto.

In order to work with or from these assumptions, within the confines of the library's goals and objectives, we should develop a strategy that will help us to try and identify the problems which are pertinent in library programs for our ethnic publics. They may be because of:

a. Limited materials of interest to our particular ethnic publics.

b. Too few staff who speak the language of all ethnic groups.

c. A lack of appreciation for the traditions of our ethnic groups.

d. An inability to provide experiences that are germane to the culture of our ethnic groups.

e. An inability to move away from our own traditions and incorporate the traditions of our ethnic groups into our programming process.

Having raised these issues, let us try and analyze them and determine why they are issues. Could it be:

1. We are hung up on standards that are not attainable, workable, specific and clear cut?

2. A lack of sensitivity to the concerns and needs of ethnic groups?

   A lack of dialogue (communication) between library staff and ethnic groups?

   Or maybe we need some WARM BLOOD pumped into existing staff, and/or some training in human relations.

3. Are there alternatives that are implicit in our planning processes? Are the goals and objectives of the library of any help in developing alternatives? Is there flexibility? Are there certain staff persons who need to be relocated? Or, does the library system itself need to change?

In some situations, the best change is no change at all. But rather a clear cut set of standards and guidelines that allows for flexibility in our process, a re-arranging of our library priorities and a deletion of LABELS that we use to cover up our inadequacies. Instead

of making changes, we could make better use of staff, facilities and resources and involve our ethnic groups in the process of developing programs for themselves. By involving ethnic groups in the identification of their needs, planning the programs and evaluating the process, we stand a much better chance of gaining sanction and support from our ethnic groups. They will tell us who their community leaders are, they will not be threatened by our appearance; it will be easier to identify influential people in ethnic communities, and the library's contact person(s) will become more compatible with leaders and thereby develop a mutual relationship and concern for the needs of all people. If we are able to follow this or some similar process, diversities will be more appreciated, commonalities will be within our range of concerns and pluralism will be acceptable in this society.